

CHALLENGE STATEMENT #3

Indigenous engagement / Indigenous-led projects are key to electricity expansion

What is the systemic barrier?

Historically, Indigenous communities have been engaged in the development of electricity projects only when these projects have impacted or run through Reserve land. Further, this engagement on projects has typically followed colonial models for decision-making that have limited the ability of Indigenous communities to share broadly in the benefits of major electricity infrastructure projects. Specifically, Indigenous communities have typically been denied equity ownership on electricity developments on or proposed developments within their traditional territories or Reserve land; been prevented through the *Indian Act* to leverage existing assets for loans or to access reasonable and competitive capital to develop their own power projects; and, Indigenous nations are still building the capacity to develop such projects should opportunities arise.

Why is this critical to achieving our vision?

With the exception of the National Parks, all of Alberta falls under Treaty agreements. There is no road to an expanded electricity system that does not pass through Indigenous territory. On the one hand, the electricity system and connecting infrastructure must be expanded to meet both growing and changing demand and contribute to a net-zero future. On the other hand, there is a growing potential that Treaty law will be recognized and respected, meaning that potentially all land and its use in Alberta will be subject to review through the lens of Treaty rights. Additionally, increased Indigenous ownership levels in Canada have been generating a range of benefits for major projects, including “reduced regulatory risk, accelerated permit approvals, improved communications channels, and better long-term alignment of interests between industry and Indigenous [nations].”¹ The evolving electricity system must aim to further build on these benefits.

Indigenous communities must be engaged as equal partners in any decision-making that broaches any aspect of their rights under Treaty, or involves land governed by it. Failing to do so may result not only in Indigenous communities opposing projects that encroach on their

¹ P. 26 https://fnmpc.ca/wp-content/uploads/FNMPC_National_Electrification_digital_final_04222024.pdf

traditional territories and/or which do not offer mutual benefit to affected communities, but also fail to honour the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission's \(TRC\) Calls to Action](#).

This is directly correlated to three core principles of [Alberta's Electricity Future vision](#), including: facilitating equity, adapting to change and diversifying solutions, leading to growing economic opportunities, investor confidence and creating jobs for the benefit of the many, including (and in some cases especially) Indigenous communities.

What surface-level barriers are related to this systemic barrier?

Surface level barriers are often what actors see or experience as a result of a systemic barrier. Such barriers provide insights into areas that can be improved should the systemic barrier be resolved.

The following are examples of surface level-barriers that are the result of a system that does not prioritize Indigenous engagement/Indigenous led projects:

- **Outdated and colonial approaches to engaging with Indigenous communities on power projects**
- **Lack of access to competitive capital for Indigenous communities to participate in projects**
- **Lack of capacity within Indigenous communities to construct, operate and maintain clean electricity projects, particularly in remote areas**
- **Opposition of infrastructure projects on Indigenous land due to lack of mutual benefits**